

Autumn Letters
Charles Hanson Towne



Illustrated by Thomas Fogarty

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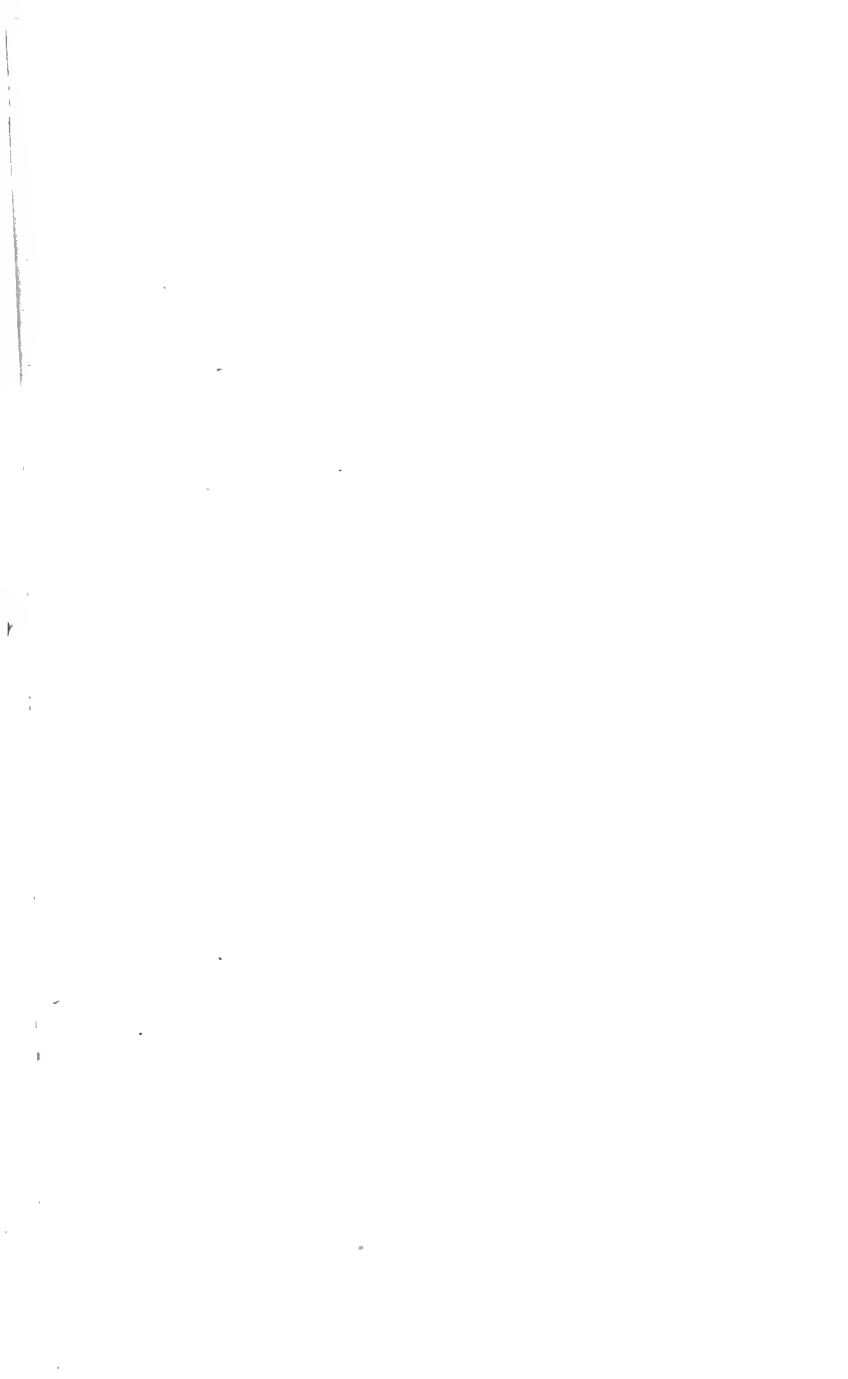
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Autumn loiterers, by Charles Hanson Town



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AUTUMN LOITERERS

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE





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PEB AND I HAD HEARD OF A WAYSIDE INN

AUTUMN LOITERERS

BY

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

AUTHOR OF "TODAY AND TOMORROW," ETC.

WITH DRAWINGS BY

THOMAS FOGARTY



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NEW YORK

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FOREWORD

THERE has been no attempt, in these few pages, to write a so-called "guide-book"—to me always an unattractive phrase. The object has been simply to record some random impressions during a tour with a friend through the lovely Berkshires on four or five golden October days. When we started out I had no intention of producing these short chapters. So I made no notes, trusting only to my memory after I had decided to write of the things we saw and loved. Had we looked for adventures and curious, interesting folk, we should, through a trick of circum-

FOREWORD

stance, probably not have found them. We left ourselves in the hands of Fate—which is only another way of saying that we trusted our ancient motor; and if what befell us will induce others to go and do likewise, our little pilgrimage will have served a happy purpose.

C. H. T.

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ONE: PLANS; OR, RATHER, THE LACK OF THEM



I

PLANS; OR, RATHER, THE LACK OF THEM

*I like a road that wanders straight; the king's
highway is fair,
And lovely are the sheltered lanes that take you
here and there;
But best of all, I love a road that leads to God
knows where.*

It was in this spirit that my friend and I started forth. We made no plans—save to reach the Berkshires; and the one little map we had was tucked away in a grip.

You will hardly believe that we were loiterers when I tell you that we were motorists as well. For forty or fifty miles an hour is the rule nowadays; not the happy jog-trot (if so old-fashioned a word may be applied to such a modern conveyance as the automobile) that, quite solemnly, we had decided to follow.

It takes more courage to motor slowly than to motor fast. Those who pass you on the road are apt to think there is something the matter either with your brain or with your machine. Seldom do they imagine that you are travelling in a leisurely fashion because you prefer to do so. Why must we fly here and there, on beaten tracks, the slaves of precedent, the lackeys of convention? And why must we always take our vacations in Summer, when a little imagination would tell us that golden Autumn is far lovelier, not only for the spirit but for the body?

I do not mean to say that Summer is not a good time for a holiday; but I do mean that Autumn is better. In the first place, if you live in a city, as I do, you will care more for the quiet, uncrowded roads of Fall. In the Summer the highways are filled with foolish speeders, and unless you get far enough away from the teeming town you might as well be on some congested boulevard. A vacation ought to mean rest; and how are we

to find that, with thousands of pleasure-seekers around us? I confess that I am gregarious; but I am also a lover of solitude.

It is as unimaginative to stay at home all the time as it is to run away all the time. Most of us have forgotten what the word recreation means. Literally, it is re-creation. We are tired; therefore we must be made whole again—we must be re-created; and a jaunt, a change of scene will, nine times out of ten, accomplish the miracle. But how are we to find the time for this jaunt? We are so busy, the excuse-makers begin; our days are so desperately filled with labour that we cannot get away.

You must make the time, even as my friend and I managed to do.

Peb and I think that we are as busy as the busiest farmer or merchant or stockbroker—or even bank president; as busy as the most industrious housewife or cattle-dealer. One of us writes manuscripts; it is the other's business to read them; and as the old sheets of

paper piled higher and higher on our separate desks—even as soiled dishes may be piling now, dear housekeepers all over the land, on your kitchen tables—the prospect of a vacation seemed farther and farther away. How could we leave with a clear conscience? And how could we ever catch up when we came back?

Then, one crisp Autumn morning, we simply left! That, we decided, was the only way. Somehow the routine would go on; somehow the work could wait. And the longer we delayed the real re-creation which we all need, the more apt another and a longer holiday would be forced upon us. And we were not ready for the longer journey—yet awhile!

My friend Peb lives in a fine house in a village near New York. At first he planned to meet me in town with his car, and whisk me, like an express package, out through the grimy streets until, at a more leisurely gait, we could traverse the country highways. But another idea seemed better. I would spend

the night before our pilgrimage at his place, and so start early in the morning, when the air was like wine, and the heavy breath of the city would not pour its wrath upon me when I tried to escape.

For the city is a monster, jealous of all those who seek freedom from her bondage. And New York, laid out in a long thin pattern, is like a trap that holds us in its fearful clutches. For more than an hour one may squirm and twist on seemingly never-ending streets before he finally reaches the serenity of the country. Just as you think you are out, you are caught again, like a poor bruised animal; and for all your speeding motor you are long within the city's iron radius, even though you arise at dawn to escape.

"I want to be on a golden-lined country road at once," said Peb; and so I went out to his house the night before we started.

My friend loves his six-year-old car as another man loves his twenty-year-old horse.

"I've tried her," he always says, "and she

hasn't failed me yet. She can climb hills like the latest model; so why should I go back on her?" And he fondly strokes her old grey side. For a good car comes to be like a good companion; and Peb said he couldn't even bear the thought of painting "Old Reliable," as he called her, any more than he could think of painting Dobbin, who stood in her stall in the barn. "She may be ugly," he would excuse himself, "but it's a good, wholesome ugliness. I never did go in much for fancy-work! Do you mind so antiquated a machine?"

I assured him that I did not; indeed, I felt exactly as he did. I like old shoes, old gloves, old houses; but most of all I like old friends. And "Old Reliable" was to prove the best friend I had met in many a year.

TWO: WE ARE OFF



II

WE ARE OFF

THE children had waved good-bye to us, and Peb's wife had given us gentle warnings. Our baggage—such as it was—lay piled in the seat behind, and a swift swing through that Norwalk gate brought us out on a clean, brown road, bordered with crimson trees and shrubs—a highway made for our delight, a dream before our eyes, to which, I confess, the tears almost came at the prospect ahead of us.

For we were free! We had run away from Work for a day or two; but our chief joy was in knowing that though purposely we had dropped out of the maze of life, with even stronger purpose we would return. It is good to labor; but it is also good to play. "The holy gift of laughter," someone has said. The holy gift of a holiday, one might paraphrase.

I think that moment when I first glimpsed those bars of crimson and gold was one of the happiest I ever experienced. I remembered a passage which I had once read in a book of prison life. The author had been confined for many years, and at last his day of freedom was at hand. In his ecstasy he wrote:

“The sun shines brightly in the yard, the sky is clear, the air fresh and bracing. Now the last gate will be thrown open, and I shall be out of sight of the guard, beyond the bars,—alone! How I have hungered for this hour, how often in the past years have I dreamed of this rapturous moment—to be alone, out in the open, away from the insolent eyes of my keepers! I’ll rush away from these walls and kneel on the warm sod, and kiss the soil and embrace the trees, and with a song of joy give thanks to Nature for the blessings of sunshine and air.”

We, too, had been prisoners—or at least I had been city pent, and I had looked for-



WE ARE OFF !

ward to this holiday just as the poor convict had dreamed of his freedom.

The world was for us a wide mansion, on the walls of which God had hung a rich tapestry; and we were to be privileged to wander from room to room, through many a winding corridor, to drink in the wonder of it all.

The roof was a blue expanse, partly hidden, at so early an hour, as it is apt to be in the Autumn, by a light haze. But we could see the sun trying to push through the fleecy clouds—those clouds that looked like galleons of glory in a foaming sea. Where were they going? What happy ports awaited them? Ah! they were like us—free!

“Isn’t it wonderful?” I said.

“Yes—there is no other word,” answered Peb. And we drove on in silence—or, rather, we crept on; for it would have been a desecration to hurry through this beauty. One might as well race through a cathedral. To miss one nave or niche—it was unthinkable. And all around us were little side-altars and

sanctuaries of wonder, with wild cosmos in the place of pillar-saints, fragrant haunts and dewy shrines that the casual eye might neglect. The trees were columns that literally ascended to heaven; and the birds were choristers that told us all was right with the world.

It was as if a mad magician in the night had hung the hills with a vivid and strange beauty—a beauty lovelier than that of Spring. It was opulent with the color of the far East, passionately noble, as the palace of a Persian emperor might be. Indeed, it seemed difficult to realize that we were but a few rods from home, in the hills of Connecticut. This is one of the many astonishing things about New England—the sense of distance that it takes on—an old-world flavour, not only in its architecture, but in the flowery colouring of its hills and valleys. You will find it, I think, nowhere else in America.

There was no wind on that first morning; but there was a tang in the air that warned us it was October and not June. We had

brought great-coats, but we had not put them on. We thought of them as a precaution, rather than a necessity; but now, remembering certain admonitions, we determined not to be foolish, and I was really glad of the occasion that made us pause, for already I wanted to pry around, and touch with my foot the hard earth over which we had been rolling. I wanted the ecstasy of physical contact with the ground. I was jealous of the motor's intimacy with it. For city pavements are city pavements, and it was not every morning that I fared forth on a real dirt road. I wanted to *feel* it—just as, when I first went to London, I wanted to touch the sidewalk with my hand. I had dreamed of those grimy, romantic streets, as I had dreamed of these Autumn highways. I could—don't smile!—I could have leaned down and kissed them. I was, in truth, as sentimental as my poor convict.

A little knoll lay ahead of us. This proved our first excuse for stopping. One is always—though heaven knows why!—a little

ashamed of that first unnecessary stop. We get so accustomed, I suppose, to rote and rule, that it seems a bit like truant to pause and simply "look off." I remember once an oculist telling me that the best way to rest one's eyes was to practise this same "looking off." In the hive of a vast city one doesn't have much chance to follow such almost ironical advice; so that when a benighted spirit finds himself, on a hazy Autumn morning upon a little hill, with a glen below and a vista of green-and-gold stretching in every direction, he pauses, with a savage joy, to drink in the loveliness. He knows that beauty like this cannot last. It is too perfect. He must hold the magic in his heart while he can. That tree against the sky; that shadowy fold in the hills; that smoke curling from yonder chimney; that lonely haystack, set with such unconscious perfection in the field below; that broken stone fence, twisting through a brown meadow—is there no alchemy whereby such pictures, framed on this matchless morning,

can be retained forever in our memory? Why must they pass? We look, and look, with an almost tragic wistfulness; we will ourselves to hold always in our hearts this evanescent scene. It is like a dream. Can we remember it when tomorrow comes? We almost reach out our hands for it; and we wonder how people who live in the midst of such glory can be, even for a moment, unmindful of it.

But are they? I think that the reflection of it is in their faces—particularly in the faces of the very old. Nature is a mirror; gaze deep, and you will come away with some of her own perfection.

No beauty lasts; no dream stays on;
Earth wheels from ghostly dawn to dawn.
And soon, ah! soon, the red moon pales,
And even golden Sirius fails.

O whither, like a phantom, goes
The royal crimson of the rose?
Behind what rampart of the night
Retreats the sun's imperial light?

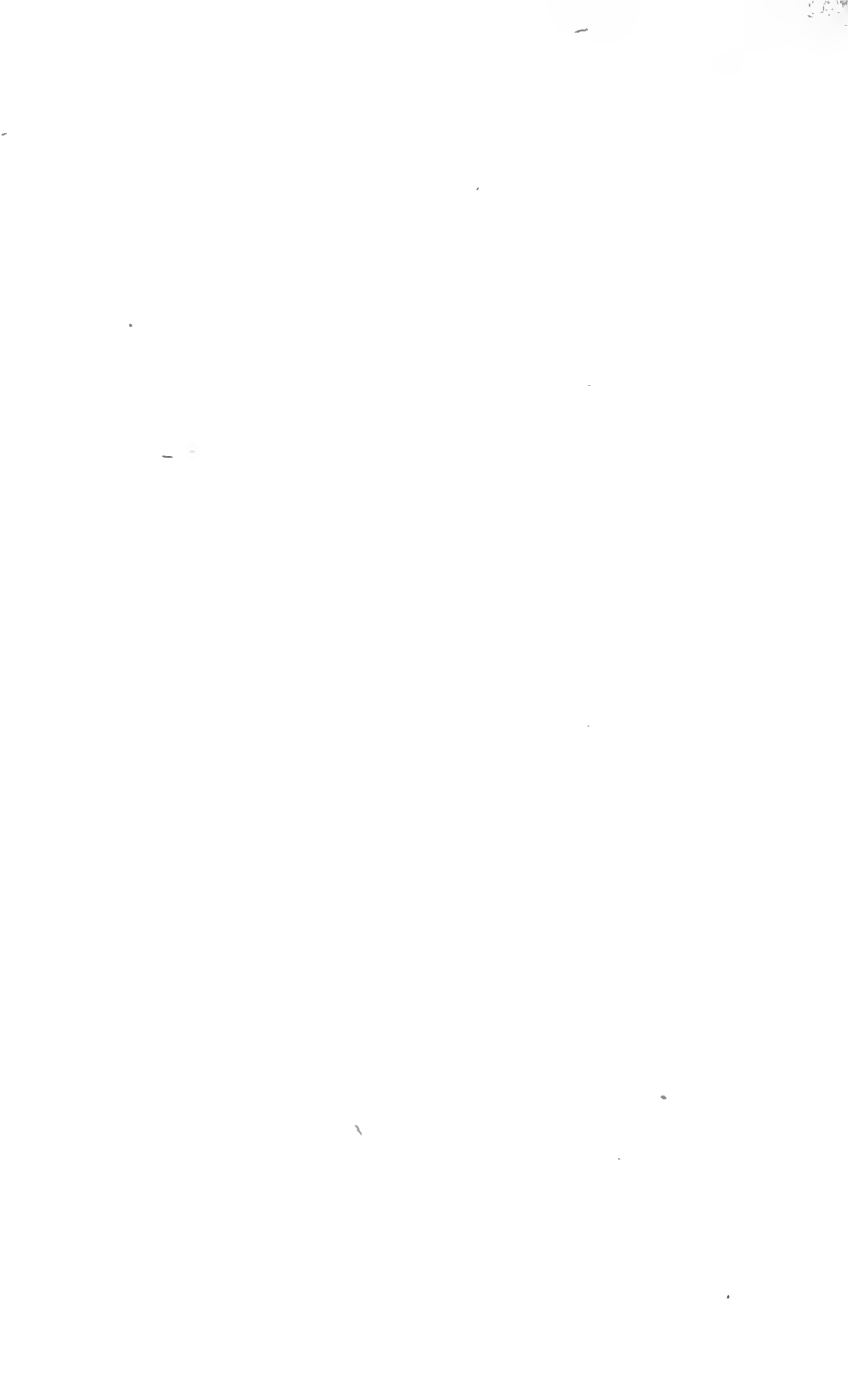
AUTUMN LOITERERS

We do not know; we only guess:
Yet loveliness crowds loveliness,
And every starlit evening seems
More wonderful than vanished dreams.

How still it was! In the presence of such a panorama we courteously stopped our engine. To speak seemed a sacrilege. And so we stood there, two tired men on a little hill, already eased and comforted by the quiet we had found so close to the throbbing, thundering town.

THREE: A HALF PROMISE





III

A HALF PROMISE

PEB and I wondered, in our happiness, at the motorists who passed us, wrapped up like mummies, turning neither to the right nor the left. Only a bit of visible skin told us that they were human beings. They flashed by us now and then, like images on a lantern-slide; but I am glad to say that on that first day out we encountered only a few such unimaginative folk, and we pitied them for what they missed. Their goggles reminded me of dreadful and fearsome masks, such as the children wear at Thanksgiving time; and as I have never been able to understand the custom of the children on that particular day, so I have never been able to fathom the man or woman who wraps up like a polar bear in the name of happy motoring, unable to speak, hear or

see. Their bulk looms large in the close-up, as the moving-picture people would say; and they sway at the sudden turns, no more crying out in the presence of danger than in the presence of beauty. There they sit, voiceless, solid as adamant, certain, I suppose, that they are having a splendid time.

The craze for speeding has driven them to this barbaric costume. Perhaps underneath they are estimable folk; and perhaps every day I meet them in the street and fail to recognize them. Truly we know little about our neighbours. Motoring has made many of us Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes. I am sure I prefer to motor as I am, and see something on the way—those trees, for instance, that stand like torches in the dusk of the year.

I said that we had made no plans. But I had forgotten that we had promised some friends in Norfolk that, if possible, we would lunch with them on our first day out; yet we made it clear that not even the prospect of a delightful hour at their board could urge us

to greater speed. If we came, all right. If we were not there at a certain time they need not expect us. And would they forgive us if we didn't telephone along the way?—for we wanted to be free from just such reminders of civilization. Perhaps it was selfish of us; but for once we were determined to be happy-go-lucky; and we wanted to forget social amenities and all the proprieties of the city. We had made up our minds to loiter, and to loiter gloriously.

We had made such an early start that we reached Torrington long before noon; and here, simply because we had made a half promise, we inquired of the Irish policeman who safeguards the main thoroughfare by holding up his hand at the proper moment the shortest route to our friends' village. I know that his morning was not a particularly busy one; but on the other hand our arrival could not have meant much to him in the way of excitement. Yet he stepped up close to our ancient car, pulled out a road-map so that

we could make no mistake, and wished us the top of the morning and all the luck in the world. He was the first stranger we had spoken to, so his beaming courtesy meant much to us. We had the comfortable feeling that folk are never strangers long in the country; and for that reason the next stretch of road looked all the lovelier to us, illuminated by that young Irishman's smile and his roguish, laughing eyes. I wish I had asked him his name. I'm sure he's a Michael; because that is the finest Irish name I can think of.

We got to beautiful Norfolk, which is high in the hills of Connecticut, and so close to Massachusetts that the village seems not to have been able to make up her feminine mind which state she preferred—we got to Norfolk at about half-past one. We came around a back way, thanks to our kindly "Michael," which saved us nearly an hour; and as our old car climbed the hills without difficulty, as Peb said she would, we smiled to think how

we would surprise our friends. We would tap at their back door, and, like two wandering beggars, humbly ask for bread; for by this time we were hungry, and almost wished we had driven faster. We were ashamed, too, of our selfishness. Perhaps luncheon was over, and we would get—as we deserved—only a crumb.

“The house ought to be up there,” I said, pointing to a certain eminence that commanded a splendid view of the rolling valley that now stretched below us. “I don’t see it yet, do you? I wonder if we’ve lost our way?”

“No, this is the right road,” answered Peb, who has a marvellous sense of direction. “I remember I came this way once in the Summer.”

But all outdoors has a way of looking different in the Fall. We had to admit that a certain turning-point took on a wholly new aspect at this time of year. A clump of strippling trees that I had remembered had lost

their leaves already; and as the premature loss of a young man's hair will alter his whole countenance, so now the converging roads beneath seemed changed.

FOUR: A SAD SURPRISE



IV

A SAD SURPRISE

THE sun had come out, but not in the blinding fashion of Summer. Like a colossal fan, its beams were spread all over the hills and valleys; yet our coats felt good as we drove along.

“But where is the house?” Peb questioned. “I know it ought to be up there.”

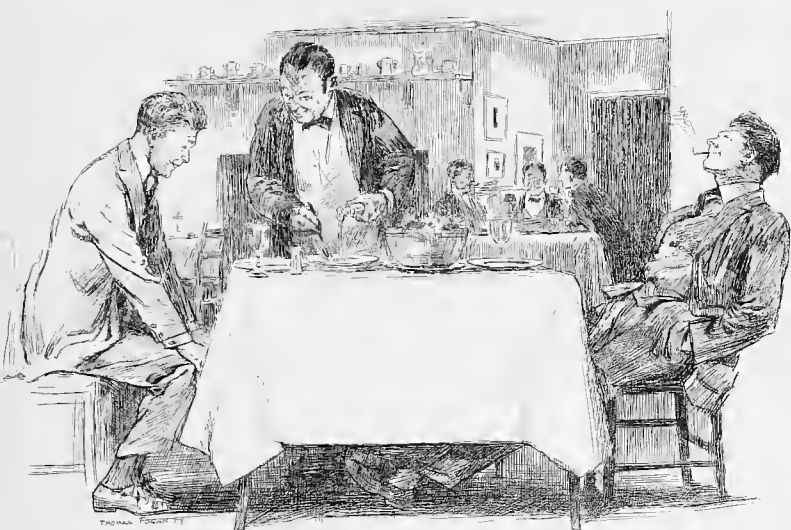
Suddenly we saw two men silhouetted against the sky, at about the spot where our friends lived. Then I noticed that a tall, blackened chimney—nothing else—loomed beside them. We put on speed; in three minutes our worst fears were realized. Our friends’ house had burned to the ground that morning. There was no back door—no front door—at which to beg for food. Everything had vanished, save the gaunt, dark pile of bricks that once had been a chimney. While

we had been so pleasantly loitering, this catastrophe had overtaken two of the best friends we had in the world, and we thought, with shame in our hearts, of our selfishness in not telephoning—even though the message would never have gone through.

The two strangers, who had come up the hill to view the ruins—indeed, they had helped to put out the blaze—directed us to a little white cottage where, they said, a certain kindly Dr. Q. had comfortably installed our friends. “It’s the bachelor quarters on his estate,” we were informed, “and fortunately was vacant at this time of year. So Mr. and Mrs. S. and the children walked right in.”

Down we went to this cottage, and found the best group of losers you have ever seen. They had taken their misfortune philosophically, and were thankful that they had escaped without injury or serious loss.

“And it’s really been so wonderful,” Mrs. S. said, “to see how kind our Summer neighbours have been. We were total strangers



HERE WAS IN FACT OUR IDEAL INN

here in June; now we feel that we have fifty real friends. And the best of them all are Dr. Q. and his lovely wife. I can't think what we would have done without them."

At that moment the genial Dr. Q. came in to see how his campers were faring. He had poked his head in the door every hour or so since the disaster, bringing a dish or a fresh supply of towels himself, a warmer blanket for the children's bed—in fact, anxious to supply any extra comfort; seeing that the larder was replenished, and even that pen and ink and paper were given the man of the house. For the man of the house happens to be an author, and though he couldn't go on with his interrupted chapter that day, he was no less appreciative of the kindness behind the superfluous gift.

"Just as you begin to lose faith in your fellows," he said, smiling, "something like this happens to bring back your belief in human beings. The K.'s down the road, the L.'s next door, the J.'s on the mountain, to

say nothing of Dr. and Mrs. Q.—well, what would we have done without their sustaining kindness? ”

The telephone rang as he spoke. It was a Mrs. B., saying she had four extra suits and any number of extra dresses that would fit the children of Mrs. S., and she was sending them right over. And I think that I never saw so many jars of jelly and jam as arrived while we sat there. And pickles, and fruit, and the loan of a man to clean up . . . But I need not go on. You know, as well as I, how good the world is.

We shared a belated luncheon with our happy, yet unhappy, friends. We heard the story of the defective flue, of the courage of the village fire department—such as it was—and the fortunate escape of the household, with everything save the children’s clothing. Already we had learned to loiter on the road; and it would have been pleasant to loiter here in this cottage; but of course we felt—and were—in the way. Moreover, the sun had

suddenly gone, like an inconstant lover, and light rain on the roof warned us that we had better put our cover up and press on to the next town.

For we had resolved to face any weather. It was childish to go forth on so short a holiday—like semi-virtuous thieves we said that four golden days were all we would steal—and be afraid of a storm. One cannot be intimate with Nature and despise her clean baptism of rain. One cannot claim a love of the open, and disappear indoors with the first gust of wind. Peb and I wanted to hear the Autumn leaves rustling in the woods, and see them whirled about the highways. There was nothing at all that we could do for our friends; they were in far better hands than ours, as comfortably set up at housekeeping as one would care to be, and busier in thanking people than in begging from them.

So we said good-bye, and went on. But not before Dr. Q., who hospitably urged us

to stay at his house for a dinner in honour of the S.'s escape, had pressed a box of sandwiches upon us, lest we shouldn't strike the right inn by dark.

FIVE: A MAGIC WORD



V

A MAGIC WORD

I WONDER if certain words mean as much to you, dear reader, as to me? I have always felt the indescribable charm, for instance, of the word "inn." It sounds comfortable and cozy—so much more intimate than "hotel," which is cold and hard. I instantly think of drawn curtains, lamplight, an open fire, with a group of friends before it, a well-filled cupboard, a genial host, a hot toddy, perhaps, old silver and blue china, a general air of well-being, and, to cap all, a feather bed and a night of sound sleep.

Peb and I had heard of a wayside inn, or tavern—an equally charming word—in the mountainous district near Copake, which was just over the border of Connecticut, in New

York State. We thought it would be delightful to worm our way toward so highly praised a spot—it sounded like something in England—reach it, quite hungry, long after nightfall, and enjoy the French dinner we knew we should find awaiting us.

So we took the road that leads to Canaan—a nice old town,—and then we went through Salisbury to Millerton, always led by authentic sign-posts whereon definite fingers pointed the way. The drizzle—it proved, a bit to our disappointment, nothing more—made it advisable to travel even more slowly; for a meticulous motorist takes no chances about skidding.

At Millerton we needed “gas,” as, in the American fashion, they abbreviate the three-syllable word—and we found a fine gentleman to give it to us. These garage keepers all along the road do a thriving business and are as pleasant, most of them, as an Autumn morning. They are a recent acquisition to our society, taking the place of the old liverymen;

and they are even more intelligent, since they must be good mechanics, as well as good business men.

The rainy twilight was lovely, and I was reminded of a friend of mine who, whenever we travel together on a boat or in a train, insists upon applauding the scenery. Yes, literally! He holds that we clap our hands and exclaim over many inconsequential things, and omit expressing our approval of the greatest of all Stage Settings. I felt like applauding now, for the dripping leaves sparkled in the evening glow, and the pleasant music of the light wind was a fitting orchestra for the performance that never ends.

We found a back road toward six o'clock, in a rain that now beat steadily in our faces. It was a beautiful little road—perhaps some would call it only a path—and I liked it so well that I made this inadequate song in its honour:

AUTUMN LOITERERS

O men may praise the highway,
Crowded with delight;
I love this little byway
Upon a rainy night.
I'm glad that it is my way,
At time of candlelight.

Call it an ancient, slack road,
Unfit for splendid cars;
A dingy, rainy, black road,
Unlit by moon or stars;
I love this little back road,
With all its wounds and scars!

The little, out-of-the-way places are best, after all. Anyone can find the broad, booming main road; but the joy of wandering about is increased threefold if we discover something for ourselves.

Our back road led us, literally, to "God knows where." In other words, toward seven o'clock we came to the conclusion that we were lost. Peb and I were so excited that we forgot we were hungry. Lost—and on the first night out! It was too good to be true!

Here and there a light could be seen. Someone had placed a casual lamp at the window, and the warm glow behind partly drawn curtains gave both of us a homesick feeling, particularly as we did not know our way. Smoke curled from red-brick chimneys, and a growing wind blew it in every direction. I thought how cozy it would be to have a meal with some of these good, peaceful folk; and while my thoughts ran on, the rain poured down upon us, as if dropped from a bucket, and I remembered Dr. Q.'s sandwiches.

"Shall we eat one?" I said.

"And spoil our dinner?" answered Peb, peering in front of him, and trying to keep the car in the middle of the path.

"It doesn't look as if we'd get any dinner tonight," I suggested. "I think we'd better eat *one* sandwich, anyhow."

You have never tasted, perhaps, the famous Q. sandwiches. If you had, you would know that a mortal can never stop at one. You

might as well expect a child to be satisfied with half a gingersnap. Peb and I each consumed three—or was it four?—and then settled back to the excitement of being lost in the wind and rain and darkness.

The night hung before us like an impenetrable velvet curtain. We heard the rustle of the Autumn leaves, as we had desired; and we seemed far indeed from any human habitation. We wouldn't put up our wind-shield, for we liked the beat of the rain in our faces. We really hadn't an idea where we were.

Suddenly, out of the blackness loomed a light and a cloaked and hooded figure was outlined by our lamps.

"Can you tell us where the — Inn is?" Peb yelled, for now the wind had become a gale.

"First turn to your left!" came back the direction. "Only a little way ahead."

We thanked the mysterious stranger, and pushed on. The first turn to the left brought us to a railroad track and then to a steep



WE THANKED THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER AND PUSHED ON

mountain road, up which we whirled, now dripping wet. It was a narrow path, protected on one side by a flimsy fence. We heard the rush of a cataract, and we knew that on our right was a deep gorge. One false turn, and we might plunge into the rapids below.

O the first glimpse of the hospitable lights of the inn! They looked like home to us. We were welcomed out of the night in the good French fashion, but sadly assured that there were no rooms left.

“If Monsieur had but telephoned!” exclaimed our distracted host. Our hearts sank, and our faces must have shown how we felt. “Yet perhaps I can place you in the Chalet, though it has been closed for the season, within a stone’s throw, if that will do?”

If that would do! As a matter of fact, the Chalet proved just what we wanted—a little house, corresponding, in everything save architecture, to Dr. Q.’s bachelor quarters. We could make as much noise as we wished

—a man likes nothing better than that!—and there were two bathrooms. Think of that for luxury! We needed them, for we were soiled specimens.

One of the best things about motoring is the appetite it gives you. The roadside sandwiches had but tickled our palates. I shall never forget the sorrel soup we had, the casserole, the salad, the bottle of red wine, the cheese, and the coffee, all served as only a Frenchman can serve a meal. Here was, in fact, our ideal inn.

After dinner we heard masculine and feminine laughter in the next room—a great lounging-place, with lamps and tables piled high with magazines and books, a piano and—what we wanted most—a roaring fire. We wandered in, and found merry games going on in all four corners—French girls and boys and white-haired old ladies and gentlemen, and middle-aged fathers and mothers, screaming with joy over a curious invention known as *Nicolas Billard*. I had never before seen

this game. Each table was circular, and, crowded about the board, each player endeavoured, by pressing a rubber bulb, to keep a little ball from rolling into a pocket before him. This bulb invariably sent the ball whirling toward one's several adversaries. But once in a while a player would not twist his bulb quickly enough, or he would not hold it at the proper angle, and he was defeated—amid shouts of mirth. It was lovely to see the inclusiveness of this simple game—no member of the family was left out. It was good for old and young alike. Toward eleven o'clock, when one octogenarian couple thought they had better go to bed, we were politely invited to join in the fun; and soon the contagious laughter had captured us. We felt wonderfully at home.

At the piano, meanwhile, an old gentleman had started to sing French folk-songs in a rather thin, cracked tenor voice. His old wife, with deft fingers, knitted near by, and paused in her rocking every now and then to nod her

approval. And the balls on the billiard-table clicked joyously, for three young people were having a fine game. And two old ladies in a corner quietly played cribbage, whispering to each other in French from time to time. And the fire roared, and the wind blew, and we were loath to go to bed.

Sleep that night was all it ought to be. It needed no wooing. The wind and rain in our faces, the good dinner, the open fire, the laughter—all had made us healthily tired. But we were up early with the twittering of birds at our windows, and off on a sunlit road toward Hillsdale.

A white church spire bade us welcome here—a beautiful spire, as it should have been in a village with so beautiful a name. The curved road that led to the little town gave us a good view of the surrounding country. I should like to live in a place like this, if I had my choice—clean and quiet, nestling in its solid comfort, and seeming always to whisper one word—“Peace.”

We loitered on through South Egremont, to Great Barrington, where a sign-post told us that we were motoring over "a famous road, an old Indian trail, the probable route of Major Talcott, in his pursuit of King Philip's Indians in 1676. Over it passed General Amherst's Army in 1759, and General Burgoyne, a prisoner, in 1777."

It seemed curious to read this legend, sitting there in our machine that ran without horses!

The road led straight to Stockbridge—a wonderful old town that looks as if it had been lived in for centuries. The wide main street, arched with enormous trees, seemed to stretch out its arms in welcome to all travelers, but to us in particular. The few people we saw had taken the calm of the ancient village into their hearts. I knew they had, for serener folk I have never met. You knew that they loved life; and why shouldn't they, in the blessed little New England town of Stockbridge, where the clocks seem to have

stopped? Certainly it must be true that we take on some of the charm of our environment.

At fashionable Lenox, a little farther on, we had luncheon at a great hotel set like a jewel on the crest of a mountain; and as we ate we looked out at the crimson glory of Autumn, drenched in diamond sunlight. Oh, it was good to be alive on this October day!

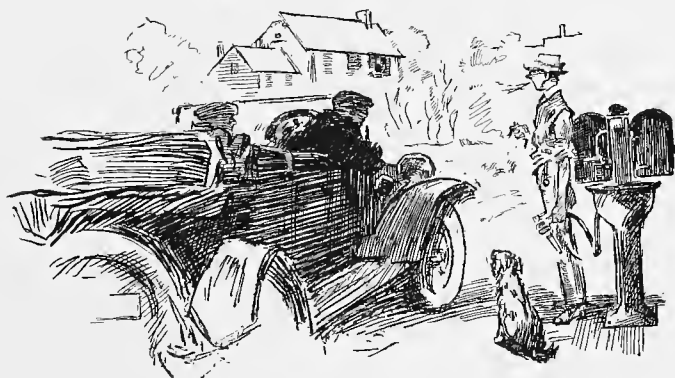
We liked Lenox so well that we stayed on till quite late in the afternoon, walking in the woods near our hotel—Nature seems to come right up to your door in the Berkshires—kicking the leaves about, and drinking in the sharp, pungent air.

We were in the heart of the Berkshires, lords of life for a few days, living almost in a dream. For there are moments too crowded with rapture to seem true. I thought of some lines, called "Silence," that I had written once at Norfolk, and I hope I may be forgiven if I quote them now:

I need not shout my faith; thrice eloquent
Are quiet trees and the green listening sod.
Hushed are the stars, whose power is never spent:
The hills are mute—yet how they speak of God!

Why should I try to tell you of the joy
that was ours that day?

SIX: ADVICE AT PITTSFIELD



VI

ADVICE AT PITTSFIELD

LOATH to leave Lenox, we finally started forth on the main road to Pittsfield—a run of only a few miles.

The main street of this thriving little town was crowded that afternoon with shoppers and sightseers, with motorists, and with farmers who had taken advantage of the fine day to drive into the village—rather, I should say city—and see New England life as it surged through the thoroughfares.

Everyone looked so happy and prosperous that it did one's heart good. Women carried baskets, in the good old-fashioned way—I remember now that it was Saturday afternoon—and you could see them bending over an outdoor vegetable counter, selecting their Sunday provisions as good housewives should select them, meticulously. Bargaining is a

delightful process if it is done in the right way; and I imagine these thrifty women knew how to get the worth of their money; and the shopkeepers looked as genial as they. We could hear customers being greeted by name, which sounded fantastic to our New York ears. Imagine a tradesman in Manhattan remembering my name for a moment! Why, he hardly gets my address right.

But again we needed gas, and while we were getting it, down the street, we discussed where we should spend the night. We had thought of Williamstown, for I knew there was a fine inn there—several, in fact.

The garage man overheard us, as he pumped the gas into our tank.

“If I was you,” he suggested, and winked knowingly, “I’d go to North Adams instead. It’s a much livelier little town.”

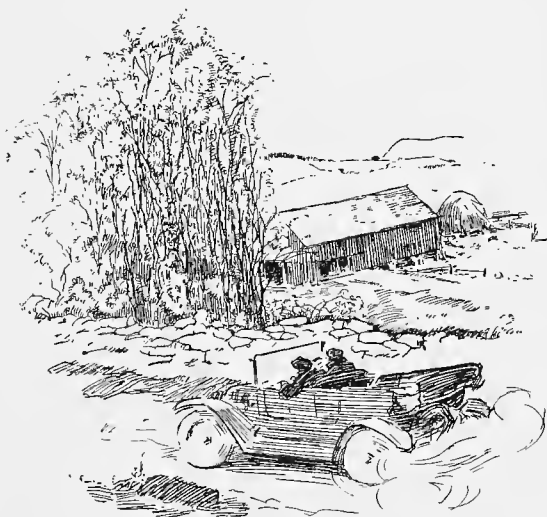
Peb and I exchanged smiles. The very thing we had run away from—noise—was being offered us, here in the most beautiful hill country of New England. And I

thought of the lines that had been in my head so short a time before. I suppose the garage keeper thought we were mad when we told him we preferred the quiet of Williamstown.

“ All right, but you’re makin’ a mistake. I could see you was city fellers,” he remarked, “ an’ I thought nacherally you’d like some excitement, an’ mebbe a movie.” He winked again.

We couldn’t get away fast enough. It was the only time we really hurried!

SEVEN: "IN GARMENTS OF
CRIMSON AND PURPLE"



VII

“IN GARMENTS OF CRIMSON AND PURPLE”

WHY is it that so many of us persist in thinking that Autumn is a sad season? Even Bryant sang,

“The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year.”

But I cannot agree with him. To me, this time has never been a time for tears. Nature has merely fallen asleep, and her dreams must be beautiful, if we are to judge by her countenance. I always think of her, say in October or November, as a barbaric queen who, in rustling garments of crimson and purple, treads the far hills with a scarlet train in her royal wake. Surely so glorious a woman, beautiful with a majestic beauty, is not cause for sorrow and anguish of heart. She has reached her full power; she is at the zenith

of her reign; and when that strangely perfect time comes which we call Indian Summer, when the days drip with peace and plenty, when overflowing bin and barn proclaim the end of a proud year, why should we weep?

Harvest time—how can it be sad? We have gathered in the fruits of our sowing; and instead of mourning we should humanly rejoice at our achievement. To loiter through New England on a golden October day, and see the garnered wheat, the haystacks, almost pink in tone, set in the fields with precision by wise hands; to watch the flocks and herds still grazing in the meadows; to breathe in the clean, crystal air—there is nothing more wonderful. Even the enchantment of April cannot overmatch it.

I never think of death in the Autumn of the year. I think of the coming April.

Why should we dream of Death

In the Autumn of the year?

Soon, soon it will be May again,

With the green rapture here.

Why should we think of Grief
When scarlet flames the hills?
Soon, soon in April glens
Waken the daffodils.

O living Autumn fire,
Your ways may lead toward Death,
But in your hand a torch you hold
That never perisheth!

And filled with light you roam
The immemorial hills;
'Tis Autumn is alive today—
Dead are the daffodils!

EIGHT: SUNSET IN WILLIAMS- TOWN



VIII

SUNSET IN WILLIAMSTOWN

It was toward sunset when we drove into Williamstown—that fine old college community in Massachusetts where it must be a delight to gain one's education. Williams College is an ancient institution, and the fraternity buildings that dot the long main thoroughfare are particularly beautiful and in keeping with the surroundings. I remember a new one on the corner, opposite Greylock Inn, that struck me for its noble lines.

Here again, as in almost all New England towns, the main street is wide and hospitable-looking, shaded by giant trees. You can see the towering hills all around you as you walk up and down, and you take on a sense of well-being in this quiet place. It reminds you of nothing so much as an aristocratic, cultured old lady, who is spending her latter days in

serenity, far from the madding crowd. She wears point lace, and her silver hair is wonderfully glossy; and she sips her tea in the twilight with that large leisure to which she is entitled. She has ceased to worry, having taken on wisdom, and she draws her shades at evening, lights her quaint lamp and reads some old, favourite volume. Truly the days run gladly for her.

I could not help imagining that in such a place as Williamstown everyone "lives well." I liked to think of groaning supper-tables, with cold-cuts and hot biscuits, and deliciously fragrant steaming coffee, and incomparable preserves "put up by Grandma," brought upstairs from long lines of shelves; and waffles with maple-syrup, and all sorts of condiments. That is what the bracing October air does for one!

Of course in such a nice old town one would be certain to find nice people. In our case, a hotel clerk—I wish I could say inn-keeper, for the term is far more picturesque—proved



"I WONDER IF THEY EVER GUESS
HOW MUCH THEY SCATTER HAPPINESS
TO MANY A LONELY TRAVELLER"

the nice person. We went to Greylock Inn, but were politely told there was no room for us. When the clerk saw our genuine disappointment, he went out of his way to telephone to South Williamstown, only five miles off, and engage lodgings in our name. And there were a dozen people demanding his attention at the time: yet he had a pleasant word for them all—he neglected no one. I thought of “Michael,” back in Torrington; and I wondered why so many travellers complain of poor service. Perhaps clerks have a better right to complain of a poor grade of patronage, if the truth were known.

Our baggage went back into the car—for an energetic bellboy had come out and removed it at the first sound of our horn—and with expressions of gratitude to the kind young clerk, we loitered down the road.

As I have said, it was sunset time, and the hills were a riot of colour. It is on a high mountain near Williamstown, so the legend has it, that a certain man may be seen moving

at the close of day—moving his furniture in a great van, a giant illusion, due, it is said, to some mysterious atmospheric condition. We did not see this monstrous phantom, though I confess that, having heard of it, I was humanly curious about it. Perhaps the atmospheric conditions were not right. If that is so, I am glad; for a more perfect afternoon I have never known, and I would rather experience reality than an illusion.

Our road curved as we jogged southward, and the brown grass made me think of a painting by Corot. I used to say that the great French artist exaggerated his tones and tints—that there was nothing in Nature just like his pictures. But look closely down an Autumn vista, and you will see the shades of brown bearing witness to the wonder of Corot's brush, proving the truth of his every canvas. Suddenly it comes upon us that it has been *our* fault that we have not seen this delicate colouring before.

The sun flamed in the west as it does in a

Turner. Turner has been accused of piling on too much colour; but there again the critics are wrong, for he has simply caught each sunset that he has given us as it must have been for one immortal moment. And he has preserved for all time, as every artist longs to do, the thrilling loveliness that is seen, sadly enough, only for an instant. I longed to be able to paint this particular sky—magenta, pink, saffron, yellow, mauve—how the colours blended and broke in undreamed-of opulence! I remembered Robert Loveman's couplet,

Some artist saint spilled all his paint
Along the western sky.

Yes, a saint indeed must have left all this glory for us; and blessed be his name!

NINE: THE PEOPLE YOU PASS



IX

THE PEOPLE YOU PASS

ON the winding road to South Williamstown, we met a bevy of young people—some of them from the near-by golf-links; the lads evidently college fellows back for the Winter term, the girls as fresh and rosy as only youth and the country can make one. They were singing in the sunset—there must have been a round dozen of them; and their voices, vigorous and joyful, reminded me of some happily youthful Greek chorus in the days when the world was one vast garden set in a blue sea.

We loitered even more at their approach, and their song reached its conclusion just as they passed us. We couldn't help applauding, and we were rewarded by the most glowing smiles I have ever seen, and many wavings of hands, and shouts of "Good-bye! Good-

bye!" as our road turned and they were lost to sight.

O youth, youth! there in the dusk of the day and the year, you will never know how you lighted up, as with a torch, the night that lay ahead of two certain travellers who have almost crossed the horizon of middle age. We were very grateful to you that evening.

A little farther along we struck a rather dilapidated cabin, and several shy children were standing in the front yard, gazing at us, while their dog came bravely out to bark. Peb and I indulged in our desire to wave to them. At first there was no response, until their mother, with a dish-towel in her hand, came to the door and fearlessly and smilingly shook it; whereupon the whole band of children took sudden courage and waved too. And then an old man—probably the grandfather—came from the little red barn near by; and he too joined in the general waving.

We got to wondering about the lives of

such people, and speculating upon their happiness. We should never see them again, perhaps; just as we should never see the young people a little way back; but they are photographed on my brain, and I am glad I am in the world with all the folk one passes on the road.

The folk we see—yet never meet—
Whether on country road or street,
With faces shining, bright of eye,
Turning to wave a last Good-bye—
I wonder if they know the thrill
They give me when I cross the hill.
I wonder if they ever guess
How much they scatter happiness
To many a lonely traveller
With whom they never may confer;
And how much joy their presence gives
To one who struggles as he lives.
I think of them when night comes down
Upon the throbbing, restless town,
And love to picture them at ease
Beside their fires among the trees,
In country lanes, in sheltered nooks,
Surrounded by loved ones and books,

AUTUMN LOITERERS

At peace while all the world goes by,
And cloud-ships sail across the sky.
Dear folk, I think of you, and see
Your faces. . . . Do you think of me?

TEN: OLD MAN MILLER



X

OLD MAN MILLER

AT South Williamstown we found another good inn, with a landlord who knew how to greet his guests—indeed, I think this is the first requisite of any landlord—and to make them comfortable.

There was a chill in the air when we arrived, for in late October, after the sun has gone, thick coats are not to be despised, however warm one's blood may be. The open fire looked good to us, and the tongues of flame seemed to shout a welcome.

They gave us a fine dinner that night; and I remember that when we were told that of course we didn't have to lock our doors, how happy it made us feel. We had felt we were among the right people—those faces along the road proved that; now we knew it. It was God's country, in truth, where everything was

open and honest. When we expressed our surprise at the slender cost of our lodging for the night, the landlord laughed and said, "Well, we don't try to stick people up here!" How refreshing that was, and how unusual—at least, to us! In great cities one is not accustomed to speeches like that. Our hearts grew warm with our bodies, as, after the splendid roast chicken, with "fixings," we sat in the hall before the blaze. Then Peb suggested that we go down to the village store to get some thicker woolen gloves—those he had brought proved a little too thin for Autumn driving. It was only a step, down a little hill. We left the wood fire for the chilly night; and in a few moments we were glad that we had, for we met Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller it was who kept the village store—a fine old gentleman, with a rosy face and a thick thatch of silver hair, a round body set on firm legs, a winning smile, a friendly hand-clasp, and a voice full of laughing cadences.

“ Good evening, gentlemen,” was his hearty greeting. “ What can I do for you? ”

He rose from his seat by the little round black stove, ready to serve us. A couple of chauffeurs were warming their hands by the fire, for by this time there was a touch of frost in the air. An old crony of Mr. Miller had his feet tucked on a convenient corner of the stove; and the one dim oil lamp revealed about everything one could desire. There were apples and chewing-gum, ploughs, bread, prunes, brooms, books, post-cards, candy, kerosene, butter, lard, boots and shoes, rakes, molasses, cinnamon and popcorn, jars of jelly, rubber coats—to mention only a few of the articles we saw. What cargoes were in the dim background we never discovered. Gloves? Of course he had them, and they were warm, and cheap, and the very thing Peb wanted.

But with the purchase of the gloves we did not leave the store. No, indeed! It seemed to invite us to stay. The tiny stove drew us

to it like a magnet, and I began to understand the fascination of this village meeting-place for men—social centres such as these are all over the country, and joke about them as we will, they have their uses and advantages. They are far better than the corner saloon, for one thing; and whatever gossip emanates from them is doubtless harmless, and seldom vicious. Politics is the subject that makes up most of the conversation; and I suppose when women are enfranchised in all the states they will join these informal meetings now and then! Their presence might lend them a dignity which they do not now possess.

Of course, Mr. Miller, like all good citizens, was deeply interested in the election that was so near. He had definite views to express—which he did with no little humour. “I can’t help what your affiliations are, strangers, I have to speak out what I feel—that’s the way I’m built!” And we loved him for his outspokenness, though not always could we agree with him.



IT WAS MILLER MONOLOGUE NIGHT—AS WE LEARNED
IT WAS OFTEN APT TO BE

“We’re all in this old world together,” Old Man Miller said, “an’ whoever wins—well, we’ll stick together, won’t we? For we’re good Americans first, an’ good Democrats or Republicans or Prohibitionists afterward!”

It was Miller Monologue Night—as we learned it often was; and the old gentleman would go on talking while waiting upon the customers who came and went—though most of them stayed to listen to the happy Miller laugh and the philosophical Miller talk. They couldn’t help it.

“I don’t care whether you buy or not,” he said to us, “you’re welcome here. I like young folks around me, an’ I generally have ’em. I’m a widower these fifteen years, but my children are a blessing. Why, I’ve been up in the orchard all afternoon pickin’ apples with my son Bill—not off the ground, you understand,” he added quickly, “but off the *trees!* I’m as spry as I ever was, an’ I’m seventy-four.”

We couldn't believe it. He didn't look a day over fifty-eight.

"How do you manage to look so young?" Peb asked.

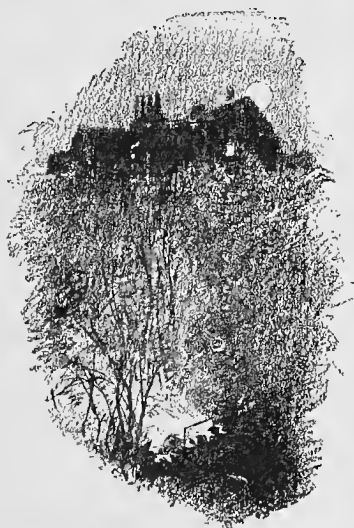
"Clean livin', an' a vital interest in my country an' in young people. I sleep like a baby. Mebbe that's because I never cheat anybody," and, winking, he put several extra ounces of sugar into a bag he was filling for a shabby little boy. "There, son, I guess that'll hold you for a while," he said, handing out the sugar with one hand and a rosy apple with the other.

I think we must have stayed in that little shop till midnight. The hours flew by. Finally the lamplight began to fail, and Old Man Miller saw us to the door.

"Whew!" he said, as the sharp wind blew in. "There's a real nip in the air. Frost tonight. Good evenin', gentlemen, an' pleasant dreams. Do come again."

And he shook our hands in real friendliness.

ELEVEN: RADIATORS AND MOONLIGHT



XI

RADIATORS AND MOONLIGHT

RADIATORS—and moonlight! They seem about as far apart as fur caps and nightingales. Yet I must tell you how the one, noisy and petulant, brought me to the other, still and serene.

We fell asleep, as Old Man Miller said he did, like babies. But toward three o'clock I was awakened by an incessant hammering. As I opened my eyes, I thought of my unlocked door, and wondered, half awake, if the charge to leave it open had been a ruse so that dishonest servants might rob us. The noise continued, and I was soon fully conscious. Then I realized that, because of the cold night, the steam had been turned on—undoubtedly for the first time that season, judging by the ferocious clamour of the pipes.

They seemed to resent their sudden call to work.

I stood it as long as I could. But I confess I disliked crossing that wide room—my windows were open—to shut off the sizzling steam. It takes no little courage to get out of a warm bed on a nipping night. I heard Peb snoring in the next room, and I knew that *his* pipes were all right! He sizzled away, oblivious of my pounding radiator, or of his own, for that matter; and I envied, as we all do, another's ability to slumber while we stare into space, fully awake.

I knew there would be no rest for me during the remainder of that night, unless I got up and attended to the steam; but I couldn't bring myself to it. No doubt I expected a miracle to aid me. I pulled the comforter closer about me, and turned over. I even covered my ears; but the pounding went relentlessly on, and finally one frightful blow, as though a human being had struck the iron with steel, caused me to leap from my nest.

My, but it was cold! One swift turn of the regulator, and I had silenced the annoying steam. Then I realized that the room was flooded with a white radiance, which had enabled me to see my way about and which, so intent was my mind on the noise, I had not noticed.

I turned to the open window, first pulling my fur coat about my shoulders. Such moonlight I have never seen. The valley was bathed in it, drenched in liquid silver that seemed to pour out of the heavens in cascades of glory, in Niagaras of loveliness.

O the white moon! O the stillness of the stars!

I blessed the pounding radiator that had brought me to this. I knelt there at the window, wondering whether I should rouse my sleeping friend. Then I forgot all about him; for I drank in the wonder, and was lost in the spell of the Autumn night. No Summer evening could be more wonderful than this. "In such a night," I kept repeating, "when

the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees.” And the greatest poet of all time had sung of this same moon centuries before. He had looked upon it, “in such a night,” and put on *Lorenzo’s* lips the most beautiful words he could imagine in honour of the queen of heaven. And I thought of Shelley’s lines,

That orbéd maiden, with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon,

and wondered how anyone could say it more simply, yet exquisitely and finally.

City walls shut out from us who dwell among them such visions of the moon as I had that night. There was nothing to hide her face from me. No wonder I never knew how the time passed. Eagerly I watched God’s great pearl float over the valley; and eagerly I let my soul and spirit drink in the whiteness of that miraculous night. I could never drink in enough of this peace.

Peace! That word made me think of the war-ridden valleys of Europe; and I saw dead

soldiers staring up with sightless eyes at this same calm moon. I saw those distant valleys, not white, like this, but red with blood; and I wondered how the moon could look down on me with such ghostly serenity when she had seen all the battlefields of the world, since Time began, strewn with the helpless dead. She had heard the agonized voices of millions of men in ancient Greece and Rome when the earth rocked with conflict; she had lighted up, for an instant, the Dark Ages; she had hung over the sepulchre of One who had died on a Cross; she had heard cries in the night in lonely Siberia; and she had watched the carnage of Europe only a few brief hours before I sat there at that window. Yet she could wear so calm a countenance!

I turned away; for Life seemed, at that moment, hard indeed to understand.

TWELVE: A CERTAIN BELLBOY



XII

A CERTAIN BELLBOY

THE next morning we were undecided which way to turn—whether to push slowly east toward Boston, or to go west, and come down home by way of New York State. We had had such luck with wayside inns that we were almost afraid to tempt Providence too much. We remembered our famous French place; and it did not take a great deal of argument to decide that back we would go to it, thereby “playing safe.”

I stood on the veranda after breakfast, looking out at Greylock Mountain, rising in all her majesty above the other towering hills. In the valley I saw the golden pumpkins like rows of yellow soldiers drilling in the sun, and the haystacks set like wigwams, as though a battalion of Indians were camping at the very door of the tavern. I was drinking in the

crystal air, at peace with all the world, my grips at my feet, my great-coat piled on top of them, waiting for Peb to come around with the car. As I have no mechanical sense, and never shall have, Peb always goes good-naturedly to the garage; and he always drives, or I should not now be writing this record.

Suddenly a voice at my elbow said:

“Ain’t it splendid, sir?”

I turned, and looked down. An immaculate little lad, in a makeshift uniform, was at my side, looking with eyes as eager as mine at the panorama before us.

“Don’t you get tired of it?” I asked.

“*Tired* of it! No, *sir!*” was the quick response. “Why, how *could* you? It’s always different—every day the colours change. I wish you’d been here last week. That tree down by the gate looked just like a Christmas tree. I felt like taking a present off it!”

“My lad,” I exclaimed, “you are not a bellboy.”



"I KNELT THERE AT THE WINDOW, AND WAS LOST IN THE
SPELL OF THE AUTUMN NIGHT"

He looked surprised—as well he might.

“What am I, sir?” came the rather timid question.

“You’re a poet.”

“Oh!” He did not seem to know whether I had complimented him or not.

“Yes; you *see* things—you understand. You may not *write* poetry, but you feel it,” I explained.

“I certainly do feel things,” the boy mused half to himself, and still far more interested in the hills than in me and my luggage.

I learned that David came from New York State. He had been “bell-hopping” at this inn all Summer in order to help out his widowed mother, who lived in a small village on a smaller pension.

“We close here in a week,” David informed me. “Then I can go home to Mother and my little sister. But I sort of hate to leave Greylock Mountain. She’s a beauty, ain’t she?” And he pointed to his favourite with pride. His whole face lit up with joy, as

though someone had suddenly put a lantern behind his eyes. "I climbed up there yesterday. Mr. Wiggins let me off because trade was slack, and he knew I'd wanted to go all Summer. But I was glad I had to wait until Fall. Gee! but the colours were fine!"

It was the poet again who spoke—the poet and the young philosopher. And he was a practical poet, too; for as Peb drove up at that moment, he put our bags in the tonneau with rare precision and a sense of space values. He is going to write me from his village home; and something tells me that his letters will be as wonderful as he is. I was proud to introduce David Holcomb, poet, to my friend Peb, playwright. Maybe I shall have the honour of introducing him to you some day in his professional capacity. Who knows?

THIRTEEN: "I NEVER SAY
GOOD-BYE!"



XIII

“ I NEVER SAY GOOD-BYE!”

OF course we could not have thought of leaving South Williamstown without calling on Mr. Miller. We had enjoyed the hospitality of his store and his stove; the least we could do would be to pay him our compliments and leave some little memento with so charming a gentleman. So on our way out of the village we stopped at his door. He came out, rosier than ever, and as radiant as last night's moon. He was touched by our trifling gift—a box of cigars.

“ Good-bye!” we said. “ Good-bye, Mr. Miller!”

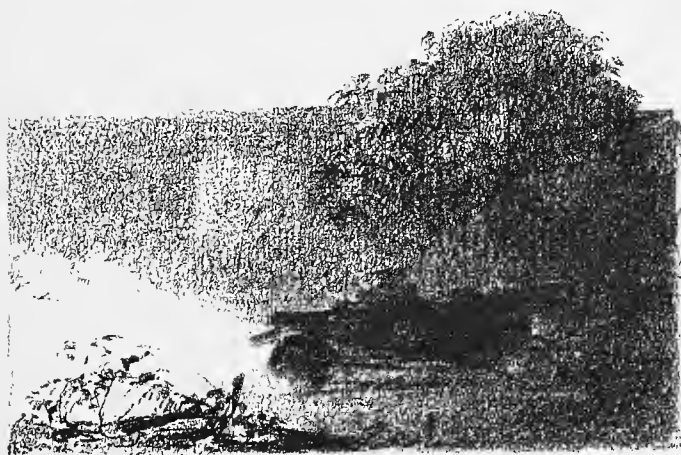
He looked at us a moment, out of those benign eyes of his, and I thought I saw a tear in them.

“ I never say good-bye, young men—I only

say good-day. Just that. We'll meet again—somewhere."

And the fine old gentleman turned away. I hope our paths will cross again before we all finish our earth pilgrimage. The Mr. Millers of this world are only too rare.

FOURTEEN: WE ARE LOST
AGAIN



XIV

WE ARE LOST AGAIN

It isn't well to study maps too diligently, unless you are in a hurry. And if you are in a hurry you lose more than half the zest and glamour of a journey. Stevenson has written charmingly on the joy of leisure—a lost blessing, nowadays. Do not confuse leisure with idleness. Sometimes the busiest people are leisurely. They have discovered the wisdom of “making haste slowly”—*festina lente*, the Italians say. Yet their work is accomplished, and idle people, because they have nothing else to do, envy them their time for golf and tennis and the right kind of motoring, and wonder why they have been denied the wherewithal for these pleasures open to us all, even in this tragically hurrying age.

Peb and I hadn't much use for maps. We

preferred to feel our way—to *smell* it, we sometimes laughed. But our sense of feeling and of smell may not have been well enough developed on all occasions. Yet once in a while we passed a sign-board on purpose without looking at it. We thought it smacked of an adventure to lose our way, as we had done just beyond Millerton; but it was like cheating oneself at a game. It is hard to get lost in the Berkshires, for the motor has forced civilization to the uttermost byways, and practically every road in New England is a good road, and in some measure a main-travelled one.

I remember that after luncheon—which, by the way, we had brought with us from the Idlewild Inn, thinking it would be a lark to eat out of doors—we said we would not consult the map; for if anything we were having too easy a trip. We were beginning to feel like a locomotive on a track—inevitably we would reach our home station on schedule time; and the very word “schedule” was

offensive to us. No matter how far off the right road we got, we could easily make the French inn by nightfall, and that was all we cared about.

So we ambled on, as carefree as two school-boys. It is a test of friendship, and a severe one, to sit in the same car, on the same seat, for hours at a stretch, with one companion. He must be the right companion indeed. This was the third day out, yet I don't believe either of us felt the strain of the forced intimacy. For my part, I know I could have driven on for days—even weeks—and been happy. If, on the afternoon of the third day out, you can plan for your next year's trip, I think there is nothing to fear. Peb and I got to talking of Nova Scotia and the Evangeline country after the War; and we mentioned California and Mexico as distant dreams. But I am wondering with how many of my friends I could thus have felt *en rapport* in a like situation.

We talked so much that it was twilight

before we knew it. We had stopped for three hours when we lunched, leaving the car by the roadside afterward, while we wandered into the woods. When we discovered how late it was—nightfall comes early in October—we thought we had better consult the next sign-board. We found one at the juncture of four diverging roads, and it was the only occasion when we were undecided as to which way to turn. I have no sense of direction myself, so I gladly left it to Peb to say whither we should turn. He seemed pretty sure of himself in this instance; but we had not gone far when he announced that the road “felt” wrong. Two women drove toward us just then—obviously a mother and daughter—and we asked their guidance. Peb is not one of those proud drivers who are above inquiring their way. We *had* made a mistake. They were going to South Egremont themselves (we were somewhere in the neighbourhood of Austerlitz by this time) and they would be glad to have us follow them. But their

machine was a late model, and swifter far than "Old Reliable," which of course they must have known when they spoke.

"Thank you," we said, "but we couldn't keep up with you."

"We'll go slowly," the mother replied, with not the slightest note of patronage in her voice—a note that would have made us writhe in fury. "Really, we're in no hurry."

So we tagged on in their wake. Unconsciously they took on speed, and the road was not all that it might have been; then, remembering that we had an old car, they would wait for us at the top of a hill. For many a mile they did this, and it was very dark when their village was reached. They waved to us as they turned in at their beautiful gate, and wished us a safe journey. We shouted our thanks. If they didn't hear us, I hope they will know now, in case they ever read these lines, how grateful we were.

FIFTEEN: BACK ONCE MORE



XV

BACK ONCE MORE

You may talk all you want of the joys of daylight motoring; but I prefer night travel. Somehow everything takes on an alluring aspect. Trees and hedges look strangely out of drawing, as if a monster landscape architect had set his huge designs by the roadside. Even houses look queer, and as if they were made of stiff cardboard. The ribbon of the road unwinds mysteriously; the crest of a hill, as you approach it, often seems, with one's headlight upon it, a very mountain; and the honk of your horn at crossings lends an eerie touch to the delectable adventure. When another night prowler comes toward you, how the light of his machine blots out the world, save within a tiny radius, and the stars and

the moon are lost for one blinding instant. Then how glad you are when they emerge again from the velvet darkness!

It is like gliding along in a dream, with all the time a vivid sense of reality and a gay, devil-may-care spirit of danger. A squirrel crosses the road and darts into the enveloping blackness; a one-horse shay, without a light, is upon you before you know it, and you turn suddenly to the right to avoid a collision—though Peb and I were not such reckless speeders, as I have said. Yet I have torn along at night at anything but fifteen miles an hour, and, I confess, enjoyed it—when the right driver was at the wheel.

They were surprised, and as genuinely glad to see us as we were to see them, at the French inn. It happened to be the last night of the season, which we had not known, and our return was taken as a good sign for the coming year. A special dish was prepared in our honour, and the Chalet being closed, we were given a state suite in the main building. In-

deed, we were made quite a fuss over, after the emotional French fashion, and I should not be telling the truth if I said we didn't enjoy it. For we were a bit tired and hungry after being lost, and we didn't sit down to dine until after nine o'clock.

The next morning we started off earlier than usual, for we knew that, despite their cordiality, the keepers of the inn and all the office force wanted every guest out of the way, so that the house could be shut up by noon. The last train for the city left shortly thereafter.

So we said good-bye, and made our way to Amenia. The country is wonderful here—a great, rolling country, full of rich farmlands and livestock. The undulating meadows looked like petrified waves, with here and there a rock, set like an island in the green sea. We grew proud of our native state, as one has a pride in his home town; and all the way down to Ridgefield, in Connecticut again, a town which is dignified and still, with the

stillness of happy and triumphant old age, we were in an ecstasy over the perfect morning, the verdant pastures, the pink haystacks, and the flush of scarlet on the hills. One thinks, on such a day in the country, of the Twenty-third Psalm. And, knowing that poem, what can one add to it?

We lunched on a towering mountain, where we chanced to be the only guests, the season being so far advanced—a lovely place that only motorists can find; and then we struck out for Brewster, with its hush of peace and its pleasant look of welcome. There are certain towns that seem to invite you to stay. Brewster is one of them; and I thought how lucky a certain friend of mine is to have found a little farm tucked away on the outskirts of this delightful old village, where he can look down on her smiling countenance every morning. I think I shall ask him to let me come up often for week-end visits. After all, if our friends want to be alone, they should choose unattractive spots of retirement. I

want to see Brewster again, and no one shall keep me away.

It was a short run to Norwalk, and, good time though we had had, how fine it was to see the friendly gate again and the loved faces once more! Peb has a home that is really a home. For all our pleasant loitering, this was the best place to loiter, after all. The Blue Bird of Happiness was at our very door, as it always is. One doesn't have to look far for the Real Thing.

“East, West, Hame's best.”

[THE END]

